

I shall begin by thanking BaNES Council for giving me this opportunity to speak on such an important matter. As we are all aware, the council intends on enforcing an Article 4 Direction across the city of Bath, making landlords obtain consent before adapting a house into a HMO (House of Multiple Occupancy). There have been similar moves in other British cities. The main concept of moving students out of city homes to free them up for families is one shared by all local parties in Bath.

I must stress that this policy would affect any group of unrelated individuals wishing to live together in a house. Young professionals, student nurses and training doctors, as well as university students, all rely on such accommodation being available, and would suffer due to an Article 4 Direction. However, this policy is a response to concerns Bath residents have about students.

The main reasons propagated in favour of an Article 4 Direction are that students are bad neighbours, student housing is poorly maintained and the high densities of students are forming what Cllr Sandry calls "imbalanced communities".

The council's own study found that densities of HMOs had little correlation with incidents of anti-social behaviour and littering. Whilst it is anecdotally true that a few students are poor neighbours, there are numerous remedies for such situations, including contacting the Police and the council.

The issue of housing maintenance and standards is largely mute, given that the council already has the power of inspection over HMOs. Indeed, students who have concerns over housing quality are encouraged to contact BaNES Council.

It was also emphasised in the council's report that an Article 4 Direction could not be retrospective; it would not be able to reduce the densities of HMOs in given areas. Given the stress on housing in Bath, a great liberalisation of planning policy is required to encourage house building, as opposed to a great restriction on housing conversion. Pressure on the universities to build new accommodation has reaped rewards, and the council should work with the two universities to identify ideal sites.

Errant behaviour by a few students, coupled with well-known stereotypes, has produced a potent perception that students are a problem for Bath. As the American economist Thomas Sowell said: "In politics, it doesn't matter what the facts are, it matters what people believe; because people vote based on what they believe, and not on what the facts are." The idea of limiting student housing will continue to burn as long as students are associated with disorder in Bath. Students should aim to be positive members of their communities, beyond contributing to local commerce, rather than appear to be usurpers of this historic city. We are indeed transients in Bath, but that does not mean we love this beautiful city any less than our neighbours do.

This policy will do great harm to Bath, and fails to satisfy the council's aims. I implore you to reject the Article 4 Direction across Bath.